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ABSTRACT

For some time organizational theorists have been calling for increased attention to and appreciation of the role of specific contexts in organizational processes. One group of researchers has heeded this call by treating the organization as a cultural phenomenon. This approach has raised many questions, including (1) What is cultural in an organization? (2) How does the cultural relate to the communicative in organizational life? (3) What descriptive framework guides inquiry of organizations as cultural phenomena? and (4) What are the advantages and goals of treating the organization as culture? In pursuing answers to these questions, researchers may gain insights regarding the salient symbols and meanings, topics, concepts, and premises in organizational communication; the role of speech contexts in organizational life; and the forms of speech used in completing communal tasks. By discovering and describing these features, researchers will be able, in principle, to construct a theory of a case which is adequate to its task. Additionally, they will develop a descriptive framework and contribute to a fund of studies for use in comparative research. (FL)

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SOME THOUGHTS ON ORGANIZING AS CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

by

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In a recent discussion of organization theory, Gareth Morgan laments the over-emphasis on "technique for improving the design, control, and performance of systems."[1] As an alternative to organizational techniques, as important as they are, he proposes a focus on "enduring forms" which must be understood regarding "the whole context of relationships" in which they reside.[2] He expresses a common sentiment of "the need to facilitate the creative interplay and development of contextual relationships."[3] Essentially, Morgan calls for an increased attentiveness to *in situ* discovery as a way of knowing organizations, over a current trend toward acontextual techniques as a way to formulate prescriptions for organizational systems. In short, he posits "the need to develop the capacity of human beings to appreciate and manage contexts."[4]

Morgan's argument, at least as I have adumbrated it, is not entirely new. For quite some time organization theorists have been calling for an increased attention toward, and appreciation for, the role of specific contexts in organizational processes. As Weick has put it: "Despite repeated appeals for contextual inquiry and sensitivity to context, no one is exactly sure what is being requested or how to produce it."[5] However, one group of researchers building on context-specific methods, e.g. ethnographic, interpretive, and context-specific theory, e.g. cultural, sometimes communicative, have heeded the call by treating the organization as cultural phenomena. The resulting formulations have been quite varied, sometimes ambiguous, or rich, depending on your perspective.

My goal in this paper is to present one way to treat the organization as cultural phenomena. I do not pretend to have discovered the way, only to suggest a way, proposed heuristically, which invites refinement through further inquiry. I will begin by briefly discussing a select body of literature which treats the organization as culture. Then I will raise four questions which I consider fundamentally important to a cultural analysis of communication and organizing. After providing my own response to these questions I will discuss the advantages and goals of treating the organization as cultural communication.

The Organization as Culture: Selected Literature

Some tend to see the concept, organizational culture, as holding great promise for resolving many fundamental concerns and for clarifying obsc e issues. Susanne Langer, when discussing the sudden vogue of such grande idees says "we try it in every connection, for every purpose, experiment with possible stretches of its strict meaning, with generalizations and derivatives."[6] Such use is apparent in discussions of organizational culture as "symbol, language, ideology, belief, ritual, and myth,"[7] as "everything that constitutes organizational life,"[8] as "rituals, slogans, myths, ideologies, stories, and specialized vocabularies,"[9] as "the integrated patterns of human behavior that includes thought, speech, action, and artifacts,"[10] and so on. While each of these authors goes on to clarify what is meant by their terms, it should prove useful to tease out some common themes which tend to re-occur in discussions of organizational culture. I

will discuss three of these themes, organizational symbolism, organizing as sense-making, organizing as communicatively constituted, which are central to the concerns of this paper.

Organizational symbolism. Inquiry on organizational symbolism tends to emphasize the similarities of peoples' meanings as opposed to their individual differences. Dandridge, Mitroff, and Joyce[11] discuss types of organizational symbols as verbal, e.g. myths, legends, stories, slogans, creeds, jokes, rumors; as actions, e.g. rituals, rites, meals, breaks, starting the day; and as materials, e.g. status symbols, company products, awards, pins, flags. They also propose three functions which symbols are seen to perform, i.e. descriptive, energy controlling, and system maintenance. This approach advises studying organizations according to these types of symbols, and their respective functions, in order to specify the "underlying character, ideology, or value system of the organization."[12] An analysis of verbal symbols as stated beliefs, and their descriptive function as a means for expression of common beliefs in an insurance company, has been done.[13] Additionally, Manning has examined the occupational culture of a police force by specifying a variety of action symbols and their system maintenance function.[14] The organizational symbolism approach, whatever the particular case of study, searches the surface symbols in organizational life as they reveal the particular principles, premises, beliefs, and values which individuals share. The intent, then, when treating the organization as symbolic is not to abstract an unconscious system of motives but to interpret the mutually intelligible codes which lend principle to an organizational context. It is a search for the locally

powerful symbols which give form to a limitless mass of information.[15]

Organizing as sense-making. Most statements on organizing as a sense-making process rely on Weick's definition of organizing which is: "consensually validated grammar for reducing equivocality by means of sensible interlocked behaviors."[16] His emphasis on "sensible sequences" and "sensible outcomes" as definitive in any organizing activity has proven highly influential. While the above organizational symbolists tend to focus inquiry on the "consensually validated grammar" or verbal symbols, others have focused inquiry on either the structural features of the sense-made, or the processual aspects of sense-making. Those who examine the sense-made of organizational life tend to write of systems of shared meaning. For instance, Pettigrew defines culture in organizations as "the system of...publicly and collectively accepted meanings operating for a given group at a given time."[17] Others define organizational culture as a "system of shared meaning."[18] While these authors emphasize the sense that has been made, others investigate the process of sense-making. For example, organizational culture is discussed as a "way in which the members of a collectivity makes sense of their interlocked activities with one another."[19] The contribution of this feature of cultural study in organizing is its heightened sensitivity to sensible or meaningful activity. With this aim, one is directed not only to the processes of sense-making which generally occur in verbalized (not necessarily vocalized) form, but also to the structure of the sense made, or the localized resources of meaning.

Organizing as communication. Implicit, and sometimes explicit, in discussions of organizational symbolism and sense-making are communicative components. Symbolism and sense are seen to be compresent with

communication. The role of communication is often acknowledged, as above, by "verbal symbols," the use of "consensually validated grammar," or as the heart of the process of sense-making. Generally, however, such statements treat communication data as means to some other more primary analysis such as worker satisfaction, job stress, organizational climate and so on. In other words, communicative phenomena are, generally, made dependent on some other theoretical concern such as exchange theory, action theory, attribution theory. Rarely is communication considered in lieu of a communicative theory. Rarely is communication brought into focus in terms of its own patterns.[20]

This is not, of course, a critique only of those who study organizations as cultural phenomena. The critique is valid given many perspectives on organizational behavior. Nonetheless, there is a lacunae here. The plea is one for the centrality of communication in organizational research. Yet, few have brought communication into focus as both data and theoretical concern. This raises important questions such as: what is the role of communication in understanding organizations as cultural phenomena?; Is communication the data of analysis only?; Is it the primary theoretic concern?; What is the relationship between communication as data and communication as theoretic concern? Any communicative analysis which treats the organization as cultural phenomena must be cognizant of such questions. The remainder of this essay will raise four central questions in treating the organization as culture, specifically 1) what is cultural in an organization?; 2) how does the cultural relate to the communicative in organizational life?; 3) what descriptive framework guides inquiry of organizations as cultural phenomena?; and 4) what are the advantages and goals of treating the

organization as culture? By briefly responding to each, I hope to suggest a direction which brings communication into focus in terms of its own patterns. As a result, I will suggest some avenues to understanding the organizing process as cultural communication.

Organizing: A Cultural Communication Perspective

First of all, what is cultural in an organization?, and, how does the cultural relate to the communicative in organizational life? In this section, I will respond to these questions with an admittedly brief discussion of three fundamental concepts in this essay, communication, culture, and organizing. In the process, I hope to clarify a use of the concepts, their interrelationships, and integrate them into a definition of organizational culture.

Communication is the primary term for the student of communication. I understand communication to be an intersubjectively constitutive symbolic activity which is largely verbal. As intersubjective, emphasis is placed on communication as events in which people engage, on the practice of speech between people, dialogically, transactively. As Gadamer has discussed, communication is a self-forgetful, I-less activity.[21] The more one is engaged in communication, the less one is engaged in the self. As Ricoeur has said, "an act of subjectivity does not initiate understanding, but terminates it."[22] The primary concern, then, is a matter of sociality (contrasted to personality). The foci are intersubjective conventions more so than subjective intentions.[23] As symbolic emphasis is placed on an intrinsic tension in speaking. The tension exists between an element of expressiveness and creativity

(focuses on present), and an element of evocativeness and re-creativity (historical focus). This duality of spokenness has been discussed by many authors in different ways. For example, Burke discusses man as symbol-using and symbol-used.[24] Gadamer discusses the tension in language between idiosyncratic usage and conventional usage.[25] Giddens writes of meaningful action as productive and reproductive.[26] Betti discusses the duality of the unfamiliar and the familiar in discourse.[27] Each discusses communicative life as a process of invention and convention. Whatever the terms, the point is: communication is a symbolic activity that includes creative expression and re-creative evocation. Both elements, the expressive and the evocative, occur in speaking and comprise a symbolicity of spokenness. As symbolic, then, communication is considered 1) as it is expressively created in a context, and 2) according to the sense, or meaning, that is brought to a context. This dual aspect of communication, as symbolic activity, emphasizes the communicative performance and the meaning in and of the performance, respectively. Combining the above, I understand communication to be an intersubjectively constitutive symbolic activity.[28]

What is cultural in an organization? Building on Schneider's definition, the cultural refers to a people's system of symbols and meanings.[29] This view of culture highlights two distinctive features. One is an emphasis on shared meaning, or common sense, as it is enacted and revealed in routine communcative life. Consistent with this interest are Weick's "consensually validated grammars" and "recipes,"[30] and Smircich's "specialized vocabularies."[31] A way to discover and describe situated systems of symbols and meanings, by analyzing cultural communicative codes, or structures, will be discussed below. For now,

consider culture as a system of shared meaning, as a particular arrangement of common sense. The second feature of cultural phenomena derives from the first. Cultural phenomena, as shared symbols and meanings, are seen to create and regulate a sense of community. As Charles Taylor has said,

> Common meanings are the basis of community. Intersubjective meaning gives a people a common language to talk about social reality and a common understanding of certain norms, but only with common meanings does this common reference world contain significant common actions, celebrations, and feelings. These are objects in the world that everybody shares. This is what makes community.[32]

By examining the particular forms of interactive life in which people participate, and interpreting their common sense, one can come to understand a community of speakers. Later on, I will suggest three communicative forms which provide, through their enactment, a communal sense. For now, consider culture as a system of shared meaning that creates and regulates a sense of community.

The cultural system provides workers with the necessary symbols and meanings (or concepts and premises) which render the organizational reality mutually intelligible; it structures coherence; it orders a shared framework of sense-ability; it entails a web of public meanings on which organizational members find themselves, in which they act, and through which they create and maintain a common sense.[33] Rather than providing behavioral prescriptions and proscriptions -- this is the task of the normative system -- it provides a common resource of meanings which can be invoked to give form to masses of information. Communicating in a particular cultural arena is to participate in a unique event; it is to engage in a local community of meanings that

structures a world intelligible to workers, imbues their activities with shared principles, and affirms their commonality in a particular, and common, sense.[34]

Regarding organizing, I prefer to follow Weick's definition which emphasizes the "sensible sequences that generate sensible outcomes."[35] I propose focusing the definition on those sensible sequences residing in a community of discourse that occur while performing a common, communal, or in some degree, public task. My intent here is not to focus exclusively on highly task-oriented, or effectively performed, activities. I am just trying to posit an essential element in any organizing activity. I consider it to be the sensible sequences residing in a community of discourse that occur while performing a common, communal, or in some degree, public task.

By adumbrating the concepts, communication, culture, and organizing, I am in a position to offer an integration of the three into a definition of organizational culture. An organizational culture is that shared system of symbols and meanings, constituted and revealed in speaking, that assigns a particular sense to activities that occur while performing a communal task. In other words, organizational culture is a particular way of speaking and meaning, a way of sense-making, regarding any activity relevant to a common task. One may include staff meetings, work groups, job enrichment programs, coffee-break talk, closet talk, employee picnics, relevant festivities and so on. All organizations' arenas of talk constitute and reveal a particular sense in their world. The task of the cultural analyst of organizations is to discover, describe, and embrace that sense.

By way of contrast, it should be useful to point to those phenomena, as important as they are, which are not addressed by this cultural communicative perspective. Those activities which occur in an organization and are individual-specific are not included. For instance, perhaps the boss has a routine which s/he follows every day. (Some researchers have called such routines personal "rituals.") The cultural analyst, from this perspective, would not report (though would certainly observe and note) such individual routines. An individual's activities are not made problematic in a cultural study. Such phenomena become cultural only when they are heard in the organization's discourse to have a shared sense. Also, the feelings, attitudes, values, and so forth that comprise an individual's cognitive constructs is not at issue here. While each worker may tell their own story, or convey their unique set of dispositions, concerns, and praises, such issues are not central to a cultural analysis. The cultural analyst would take note of such information in order to discover and interpret the common themes or premises coherent in workers' discourse. These points should help illustrate and define the boundaries of the proposed cultural communicative approach. As contrasted to an analysis of unique individuals, the guiding question is: what shared systems of symbols and meanings are constituted and revealed in workers' routine communicative life?

A Descriptive Framework

Any description or interpretation of a social situation derives, whether explicitly stated or not, from a descriptive framework. One simply cannot describe everything. All description is, therefore, partial, selective, and, in a sense, biased. What is needed is more

conscious attention to the framework which one uses to guide interpretive research and explicit statements of the frameworks used. As Dell Hymes has said, we need a "system that provides a coherent, general guide to inquiry...we need to be able to say the same sort of thing."[36] This does not mean that we are to say the same things about all situations, only that we are sensitized to looking in similar directions. In this way, a framework is used heuristically, "not a system to be imposed, but a series of questions to be asked."[37]

What descriptive framework guides research of organizations as cultural phenomena? The one that informs this essay is the ethnography of communication.[38] This framework is explicitly designed to bring speech into focus in terms of its own patterns. The assumption is: speech occurs systematically but varies from context to context, so, the goal of the ethnographer is to discover and describe speech systems as they occur in situ.[39] Descriptions are directed, fundamentally, to three places, 1) to a context such as the speech events or speech acts of a given community, or for present purposes, speech which organizes efforts around some shared task; 2) to shared meanings, norms of interpretation, or cultural communicative codes (or structures) (described below); and 3) to certain communicative forms (discussed below) which create, through a mutual enactment, a sense of community. By focusing inquiry on the context, meaning, and form of speech, one can gain a rich and insightful view of organizing as cultural communication.

My purpose in the remainder of this section is to suggest a five-phased analysis of cultural communicative codes (the shared meanings) in organizing, and to define three possible cultural communicative forms occurring in organizational life.[40]

Before beginning, it is important to emphasize that the use of these tools is contingent on a preliminary specification of a community of discourse. In other words, the analyst must consider the appropriate scope of a particular inquiry. For instance, one may analyze the discourse of a particular office, of a regular staff meeting, of individuals who consider themselves a group, or of the organization as a whole. Prior to and during the cultural analysis, one must be aware of the community of discourse of interest. While one may move within and between several levels as a means of interpreting each, it is useful to consider the primary community of discourse to focus a particular interpretive analysis.

Cultural communicative codes and organizing

By discussing a type of structural analysis I hope to emphasize the importance of developing theories of communicative meaning which are judged adequate to particular cases. In other words, the intent of structural analyses, in general, is to discover and describe the operative system of meaning in a particular community of discourse. Again, Hymes informs this analysis:

> Structural analysis of meaning must first demonstrate that a domain is a domain for speakers of the language in question. What the domain includes, what it excludes, what features define it and its elements, cannot be prescribed in advance...The exploration of native contexts of use to validate domains...points the way for a structural analysis of all speech.[41]

In short, a structural analysis focuses inquiry on the shared meanings of symbols in the context of their use.

The analysis of cultural codes in organizational communication is suitable to many purposes. It is of special use in exploring

recurring phrases or terms such as "wheeling together,"[42] "the machines,"[43] "the boss," "the job," "work," "our mission," "the station," "the terminal," and so on that may emerge when applying a descriptive framework as the one discussed here. One begins such an analysis by choosing a recurring symbol (term, phrase, proposition) which occurs in the selected community of discourse. Next, the analyst examines instances of the use of expressions relevant to the symbol(s) being studied. A search is made for expressions which define the symbol. This results in a clustering of associated terms or radiants of the symbol which begin to structure the symbol's shared communicative meaning.[44] To illustrate, I will explain some identity terms of a television station in which I am doing field work. This organization is situated in three separate buildings. One building, which I will call "X", is also used in reference to those who work there. Frequently, "X" workers are referred to as "the dreamers" or "the shakers and movers" in the organization. The primary symbol, "X", carries with it certain associated terms or radiants of meaning as "dreamers, shakers and movers."

The third phase in analyzing cultural codes in a community of discourse consists of examining the primary symbol, in this case, "X", according to its agons or oppositions.[45] The analyst, when appropriate, asks: what opposes or conflicts with this unit? Identifiable opposing units or symbols are analyzed, then, referring to their clustering of associated terms. "X" is often contrasted with "Y". The two are marked by a symbolic contrast such as "over there" and "over here" or "we-they" talk. Those terms associated with "Y" workers are "the technicians" or "the doers" versus X's "shakers, movers and dreamers."

Fourth, a search is made for arbitrary cause and effect relations. The analyst responds to the question: what leads to what in this community of discourse? The attempt here is to trace "if-then" talking. For instance, "once we get that terminal in Y, things will be great." Comments such as this one evidence a causal theme something like, once the computer terminal arrives in Y, the quality of the organization will be enhanced. The chore of the cultural analyst during this phase is to explore and examine the sequential terms, or systematically recurring causal patterns, evidenced in a community of discourse.[46]

Finally, the analyst attempts to place the symbols (terms, phrases, propositions) in a hierarchical arrangement according to cultural actors' assessments of their value or moral weight.[47] This arrangement may be organized regarding beliefs, ideologies, organizational status, or other concerns. For instance, one of the beliefs of some station members is: "our mission is to provide an alternative." Through providing "alternative" broadcasting (and its radiants of meaning) they subsume the roles of the "shakers and movers" and the "doers" while placing them in a broader symbolic context. All "station" members, potentially, can rally behind the valued "mission...to provide an alternative."

I have suggested a five-phased process for analyzing cultural codes (symbols and meanings) in an organization's community(ies) of discourse. The process involves 1) locating a recurring symbol (term, phrase, proposition); 2) searching for associated terms relevant to the symbol being studied; 3) when appropriate, identifying opposing terms; 4) exploring the discourse for relevant sequential terms or recurring causal patterns; and 5) placing the symbols in a hierarchical arrangement

according to their moral value or weight. Analyses as these are useful in describing and understanding organizational symbols and attendant values, beliefs, and ideologies. Moving within and between these five phases yields a type of cultural snapshot, a context of symbolic meaning, constituted in a selected community of organizational discourse.

Some Cultural Communicative Forms in Organizing

One of the assumptions in this approach is: people organize their world through speaking and meaning. The descriptive framework, the five-phased analysis of symbolic structures and the following forms, assume this as a process in organizational contexts. Communicative forms tend to fashion an organizational system through unifying participants. While the particular sense in cultural codes differs from organization to organization, there seem to be discernible communicative forms which function, through a coordinated discursive performance, to re-affirm and negotiate a sense of organizational identity. My purpose here is to define three communicative forms, ritual, myth, and social drama which are based on and derive from the descriptive framework discussed here and elaborated elsewhere.[48]

Ritual, as a communication form occurs, quintessentially, as a structured sequence of symbolic acts which provides a cooperative way to solve common problems by paying homage to a sacred object.[49] Communication rituals function, primarily, to regulate activity surrounding common problems and tend to unify organizational members through their aligned performance. For example, Ouchi describes a ritualized sequence of symbolic acts which occurs in a Japanese organization during

a company-wide retreat.[50] Prior to and during the first stages of the retreat certain, often lower status, employees are engaged in writing a script to be performed by members of the organization. The plot, generally, involves a lower status employee who, in some way, gains superior power over the company president (or boss). In the enactment, the president's vulnerabilities are exposed, which delights the audience, and creates a unifying bond between workers and executives. Ouchi maintains that one of the prerequisites for many Japanese managers is the ability to have their vulnerabilities exposed through such "status reversal" rituals.[51] Through the coordinated performance of such ritualized activity, the executive's status is re-affirmed, as only the powerful become vulnerable, and all workers celebrate the submission of one's self to a communal, and sacred, institution. Analyses as this may be stated for different audiences and purposes and seem useful in understanding and perhaps assessing some communication forms in the organizing process. Therefore, rituals are any structured sequence of symbolic acts providing a cooperative way to solve common problems by celebrating a sacred object.

Ritual regulates organizational activity surrounding common problems and unifies members through their aligned performance. The performance is normally affectively imbued and governed by a restricted or rigid code of unspoken consensus. As such, ritual is the solidification of common rules in discourse, essential for social order, and utilized in an organization's solving common problems often by honoring a sacred object.[52] Rituals, therefore, provide organizational members with symbolic codes, with 1) models of what to believe, what to celebrate, as evoked by the cultural structures in the event, and 2) models for

believing by establishing the appropriate sequencing of expressive acts.[53]

Myth, as a communication form, occurs within a looser texture of symbolic meaning. A myth is a great symbolic narrative which represents the unity and exclusiveness of those who articulate, accept, or respect it.[54] If a ritual's symbolic meaning stems, primarily, from a structuring of symbolic acts in which organizational members per-form, then a myth's symbolic meaning results as members explain a sense of life to themselves; it provides a type of cultural "uni-form", a shared means to order or shape coherence. Workers for the television station seem to articulate and adhere to a myth, stated in short form, "our mission is to provide an alternative." While there is not space here to extend the particular sense and meaning of this myth, I hope it illustrates a type of mythical narrative that members use to explain a sense of organizational life to themselves. As a communication form, myths provide symbolic maps for organizations, shared perceptions of sentiment, systems of folk beliefs. As myths are spoken, or symbolically acted, they translate common aspirations and fears into mutually intelligible sequences. Through myth, an organizational integrity is cultivated, a sense of unity is articulated and respected as a particular culture is adopted in, or adapted to, organizational members.

An interesting application of this type of analysis has yielded competing myths between information and data processors regarding the cultural theme, "computer", in an automated office.[55] While a myth generally applies to a unifying symbolic narrative, this is a timely analysis as organizational members attempt to assign the computerized office a particular meaning or sense.

Social Drama, as a communication form, is processual. Social dramas occur in arenas where organizational members orient to a particular problem or misuse in the symbolic system and, therefore, negotiate, transform, and/or reaffirm the organization's cultural standards. While ritual and myth occur as somewhat restricted forms, social drama manifests a more elaborated form. Victor Turner has discussed social drama as unfolding, generally, in four phases: breach, crisis, redressive action, reintegration or recognition of schism.[56] Initially, a breach occurs, a violation of a cultural code. Following the breach, a phase of crisis ensues in which organizational member's symbolic activity orients and attends to the violation. After the crisis, some redressive action occurs when the violator and his/her representative explains the violation by placing it within the cultural system, by assigning it a particular sense of coherence or symbolic meaning. Dramatic forms occur as organizational members negotiate, transform, and/or reaffirm their cultural standards.

In summary, ritual occurs as a structured sequence of symbolic acts where organizational members coordinate performance and solve common problems; myth provides a type of cultural "uniform", a powerful symbolic story which explains a sense of shared identity to be cultivated, potentially, by all organizational members; social drama provides the form wherein violations are recognized and negotiated as the organization's moral boundaries are reaffirmed or redefined. Undoubtedly, there are other cultural communicative forms in organizations, yet with these three, ritual, myth, and social drama, a community of discourse may be interpreted as it embraces and/or negotiates a sense of organizational identity.

In this section, I have suggested a descriptive framework focused on the context, meaning, and form of speech. It is heuristically offered as a way to examine organizational cultures from a communication perspective. I have proposed a particular type of inquiry which includes 1) a five-phased analysis of cultural codes (shared symbols and meanings) in organizational communication and 2) a focus on some cultural communicative forms, ritual, myth, and social drama, in organizations. By conducting research along these, and similar lines, one gains an insight into an organization's culture, a glimpse of the meaning organizational members assign their world. An analysis as the one proposed here, yields a particular sense of an organization's life which occurs in specific forms. More importantly, I hope the analysis illustrates a way to interpret organizing as cultural communication.

Some Advantages and Goals in Treating the Organization as Cultural Communication

One of the questions raised in this essay is: what is the relationship between communicative data and communication theory? As a way of responding to this question, I have proposed three communication units of analysis, three sources of communicative data: 1) the *in situ* performance of speech events, or speech acts, by a community (organization) of people which focuses on the *context* of speech use; 2) the cultural communicative codes, or meaning structures, constituted and revealed in any organizing activity which focuses on the *meaning* of speech for those who participate in it; 3) cultural communicative *forms*, or communal enactments, which function to unite participants

in their coordinated performance. Each of these offers a source of communicative data. Yet, an adequate account of speech must specify not only the sources of communicative data, but also their interrelationships. For instance, what communicative forms are used in what context with what meaning? Which contexts support certain forms? What happens to the meaning of the speech event when the forms are switched? These and similar questions lead one to specify the relationships between speech contexts, meanings, and forms. As Hymes has said,

> The use of a linguistic [communicative] form identifies a range of meanings. A context can support a range of meanings. When a form is used in a context, it eliminates the meanings possible to that context other than those that form can signal; the context eliminates from consideration the meanings possible to the form other than those that context can support. The effective meaning depends upon the interaction of the two.[57]

By focusing inquiry on the context, meaning, and form of speech, and their interrelationships, one can posit a communicative theory which is adequate to a case (its genre context); one can bring speech into focus in terms of its own patterns; one can, as Morgan requests, "develop the capacity of human beings to appreciate and manage contexts"[58] of speech use by understanding its localized meaning and operative forms. While several other advantages could be discussed,[59] chief among them is the discovery and description of speech, in context, as it constitutes and reveals its meaning and form.

Perhaps the most widely understood advantage of ethnographic, or interpretive, research is the detailed treatment of particular cases. By immersing oneself in a way of speaking one can gain a depth of understanding, through a richness of experience, which is absent, by

design, from other approaches. But, the goals of an ethnographic enterprise are not just descriptions of situated cases, though such descriptions are fundamental to the enterprise. The ethnographic method, and cultural perspective, on organizing has several other goals which I will briefly discuss in concluding this essay.

The primary goal of a cultural communicative analysis of organizing is the development of a theory of speaking which is adequate to the case under study. One of the goals is to develop an account of a communication system which is appropriate to the context of its use, to render the account intelligible in native speakers' terms, and to specify the salient forms of speech as natives participate in them. The first question to ask of a description is: <u>is the description adequate to the case</u>? Does the description account for, and illuminate, the particular phenomena of interest?[60]

A second goal of a cultural communicative analysis of organizing is the development, through heuristic application, of a descriptive framework which can account for communication as it occurs in the organizing process. A goal is to specify the necessary and sufficient features which one must take into account in order to adequately describe the speech conduct of interest. In this essay, I have tried to account for cultural communicative features in organizing by discussing context, meaning, and form. Any subsequent inquiry which uses this, or another, framework should raise the question: <u>do these features adequately account for the speech of interest</u>? By using such a framework, questioning its adequacy, re-inforcing its strengths, and modifying its weaknesses, one attempts to specify the necessary and sufficient

features of a given concern be they interpersonal, organizational, rhetorical, or cultural.

A third goal of the approach discussed in this essay is comparative analysis or intercultural study. By explicitly using a framework, a descriptive researcher has provided a base, if used in further inquiry, upon which to conduct comparative study. By saying the same sorts of things, one can compare several cases by searching not only for generalities, but also for instructive particulars. As Weick has said, "when people say something, we know nothing until we also know what possible things they could have said, but didn't. ...Anything makes sense only when it is put alongside something else."[61] Through a type of comparative study one can search the particulars for the general, and use the general to illuminate the particular.[62]

By pursuing the line of inquiry discussed above, insights should be gained regarding the salient symbols and meanings, topics, concepts, and premises in organizational speech, the role of speech contexts in organizational life, and the forms of speech in doing communal tasks. These concerns are at the heart of a cultural communicative perspective on organizing. By discovering and describing these features, one is able, in principle, to construct a theory of a case which is adequate to its task. Additionally, one develops a descriptive framework and contributes to a fund of studies for use in comparative research. These are the possibilities, the advantages and goals, of treating the organizing process as cultural communication. The hope is not to impose an <u>a priori</u> framework on an unsuspecting case; it is to offer a statement of systematic inquiry, to be used heuristically, as a means to increasing the appreciation and ability of humans to

manage contexts. By treating organizing, as cultural communication, I hope I have contributed to such an appreciation and ability.

NOTES

[1]G. Morgan, "Cybernetics and Organization Theory: Epistemology or Technique," Human Relations, 35 (1982), 522.

[2]Morgan, p. 531.

[3]Morgan, p. 534.

[4]Morgan, p. 535.

[5]K. Weick,"Organizational Communication: Toward a Research Agenda," Keynote address at the Speech Communication Association/ International Communication Association conference on Interpertive Approaches to Organizational Communication, Alta, Utah, 1981, p.39.

[6] This discussion is based on C. Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures (New York: Basic Books, 1973), pp.3-4.

[7]A. M. Pettigrew, "On Studying Organizational Cultures," Administrative Science Quarterly, 24 (1979), 574.

[8] M. Pacanowsky and N. O'Donnell-Trujillo, "Communication and Organizational Cultures," Western Journal of Speech Communication, 46 (1982), 122.

[9]L. Smircich, "Studying Organizations as Cultures," In Research Strategies: Links Between Theory and Method. Ed. G. Morgan (forthcoming).

[10]T. E. Deal and A.A. Kennedy, Corporate Cultures(Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co., 1982), p. 4.

[11]T.C. Dandridge, I. Mitroff, and W.F. Joyce, "Organizational Symbolism: A Topic to Expand Organizational Analysis," Academy of Management Review, 5(1980), 77-82.

[12]Dandridge, Mitroff, and Joyce, p.77.

[13]L. Smircich, "Organizations as Shared Meanings," In Organizational Symbolism. Eds. L. Pondy, P. Frost, G. Morgan, and T. Dandridge(forthcoming).

[14]P.K. Manning, "Organizational Work: Structuration of Environments," The British Journal of Sociology, 33 (1982), 118-134.

[15] A volume titled Organizational Symbolism (L. Pondy, P. Frost, G. Morgan, and T. Dandridge, eds.) is forthcoming.

[16] K. Weick, The Social Psychology of Organizing (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co., 1979), p. 3.

[17]Pettigrew, p. 574.

[18] L. Smircich, "The Concept of Culture and Organizational Analysis," Paper presented at the Speech Communication Assosiation/International Communication Association conference on Interpretive Approaches to Organizational Communication, Alta, Utah, 1981, p.7. For a related argument see E. Borman, "The Application of Symbolic Convergence Communication Theory to Organizations," presented at the same conference, Alta, Utah, 1981.

[19]M. Pacanowsky and F. Berkey, "An Analysis of Organizational Culture: A Theoretical Overview," Paper presented at the International Communication Association, Philadelphia, PA, 1979, p. 11. Also see Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1982, p. 123.

[20]For a lengthy development of this argument see D. Hymes, "The Ethnography of Speaking." In Anthropology and Human Behavior. Eds. T. Gladwin and W.C. Sturtevant. Washington, D.C.: Anthropological Society of Washington, 1962, 13-53.

[21]H.G. Gadamer, Philosophical Hermeneutics(Berkeley, CA: U of California Press, 1977), pp.64-66.

[22]P. Ricoeur, "Phenomenology and Hermeneutics." In Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences. Ed. J.B. Thompson. Cambridge University Press, 1981, p.113. Ricoeur makes a similar point in the same volume as he writes, "interlocutors fade away in the face of things said," p. 62.

[23] See A. Schutz, "Concept and Theory Formation in the Social Sciences," in Understanding and Social Inquiry. Ed. F. Dallmayr and T. McCarthy. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977. Also see F. Dallmayr, "Heidegger on Intersubjectivity," Human Studies: A Journal for Philosophy and the Social Sciences, 3(1980), 221-246.

[24] K. Burke, Language as Symbolic Action (Berkeley: U of California Press, 1968), pp. 3-24.

[25] Gadamer, pp. 82-94.

[26] A. Giddens, Central Problems in Social Theory (Berkeley: U of California Press, 1979). I am indebted to Bob McPhee for this insight.

[27] E. Betti, "Hermeneutics as the General Methodology of the Geisteswissenschaften," in Contemporary Hermeneutics. Ed. J. Bleicher. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980, pp. 51-94.

[28] The ideas presented here are no more that sketched. A fuller appreciation of them is apparent in Gadamer's discussion of the constitutive role of communication(see Gadamer, chapters 4-6), Heidegger's turn toward the ontology of language(see Z. Bauman, Hermeneutics and Social Science (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), pp. 148-171), and Wittgenstein's treatment of language games as forms of life(see his Philosophical Investigations (New York: Macmillan' Pub. Co., 1958)).

[29] D. Schneider, "Notes Toward a Theory of Culture," in Meaning in Anthropology, ed. K. Basso and H. Selby. Albuquerque, New Mexico: U of New Mexico Press, 1976, 197-220.

[30] Weick, 1979, pp. 3-4, 45-46, 132.

[31] Smircich, "Studying Organizations as Cultures," p. 17.

[32] C. Taylor, "Interpretation and the Sciences of Man," in Understanding and. Ed. F. Dallmayr and T. McCarthy. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977, p. 122.

[33]The web metaphor is borrowed from Geertz, 1973, p. 5.

[34]For a treatment of cultural analysis as systematic inquiry of common sense see C. Geertz, "Common Sense as a Cultural System," The Antioch Review, 33(1975), 5-26.

[35]Weick, 1979, p. 3.

[36]D. Hymes, "Models of the Interaction of Language and Social Setting," Journal of Social Issues, 2 (1967), 8-28.

[37]Hymes, 1962, p. 109.

[38]See Hymes' programmatic essay, "Models of the Interaction of Language and Social Life," in Directions in Sociolinguistics: The Ethnography of Communication. Ed. J. Gumperz and D. Hymes. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, Inc., 1972, pp. 35-71.

[39]See Hymes, 1962.

[40]An earlier discussion of these points is present in D. Carbaugh, "Cultural Communication and Organizing: Toward an Understanding of Organizational Culture," paper presented at the Speech Communication Association/ International Communication Association conference on Interpretive Approaches to Organizational Communication, Alta, Utah, 1982.

[41] Hymes, 1962, p. 104.

[42] Smircich, Organizations as Shared Meanings.

[43]R. Rodrick and M. Beckstrom,"The Mighty Machine: An Organizational Culture Study," Paper presented at the Western Speech Communication Association, Portland, Oregon, 1980.

[44] J Stewart, Rhetoricians on Language and Meaning: An Ordinary Language Philosophy Critique, unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Southern California, 1970.

[45]This analysis is based, in part, on Kenneth Burke's cluster-agon techniques. See K. Burke, Attitudes Toward History (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961); W. Reukert, Kenneth Burke and the Drama of Human Relations (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1963). For an example of the method see C. Berthold, "Kenneth Burke's Cluster-Agon Method: Its Development and an Application," Central States Speech Journal, 27 (1976), pp. 302-309.

[46] This phase is based on Weick's analysis of causal structures, 1979, pp. 65-88.

[47]See K. Burke, "Definition of Man," in Language as Symbolic Action, pp. 3-24.

[48]My discussion on cultural communicative forms is deeply indebted to G. Philipsen. See his "Prospects for Cultural Communication," presented at the seminar on Communication Theory from Eastern and Western Perspectives, Honolulu, Hawaii, December, 1980, and, T. Katriel and G. Philipsen, "'What we need is communication': 'Communication' as a Cultural Category in Some American Speech," Communication Monographs, 48 (1981), 301-317. Also see D. Carbaugh,"Toward a Perspective on Cultural Communication," paper presented at the Speech Communication Association, Louisville, KY, 1982.

[49]Katriel and Philipsen, 1981.

[50]See W.G. Ouchi, Theory Z. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co., 1981.

[51] V. Turner has discussed status-reversal rituals in depth in, The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure(Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, (2nd Printing) 1977), pp. 172-178.

[52]See R. Firth, Symbols: Public and Private (Ithaca, New York: Cornell Univeristy Press, 1973), and F. A. Hanson, "The Semiotics of Ritual," Semiotica, 33 (1981), 169-178 for illustrations of ritualized forms.

[53]Geertz, 1973, 112-114.

[54]Philipsen, 1980; A.J. M. Sykes, "Myth in Communication," Journal of Communication, 20 (1970), 17-31; Dandridge, Mitroff, and Joyce, 1980; and Carbaugh, 1982.

[55]G. Hiemstra, "The Automated Office: Promises to keep...," Paper presented at the Northwest Communication Association, April 1982.

[56]See V. Turner, "Social Dramas and Stories about Them," Critical Inquiry, 7 (1980), pp. 141-168.

[57]Hymes, 1962, p. 105.

[58]Morgan, p.535.

[59]In the keynote address at a conference on interpretive approaches to organizational communication, Weick discussed some "undeveloped concepts as opportunities" for organizational research(see Weick, 1981, pp. 39-40). Two of these were, contexts where organizational speech occurs, and, talk that is specific to an organization. The approach proposed in this essay is based on in situ interpretations of the meaning specific to an organization. So, the primary concerns in applying this approach are the contexts where speech occurs, and, the localized meanings and forms specific to an organization.

There are many other advantages to such an approach,such as a way to systematically articulate a sense of the organization to the organization's members. As this sense is articulated, it may be modified or embraced (see S. Silverzweig and R. Allen, "Changing the Corporate Culture," Sloan Management Review, Spring 1976, 33-49). Also, an analysis of organizing as cultural communication is advantageous regarding the system's coding of information or establishing of boundaries. One may be able to repond to questions like: what strategies can (not) easily be integrated into the current system?, and, what strategies

can (not) easily be implemented by the organization? These are only a few, but an important few, of the potential advantages in treating organizing as cultural communication.

[60] It is important to note here that an ethnographic analysis of speech does not try, necessarily, to account for all speech behavior. A particular study may represent a specific focus such as male role enactment(see G. Philipsen, "Speaking 'like a man' in Teamsterville: Culture Patterns of Role Enactment in an Urban Neighborhood," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 61 (1975), 13-22), the use and interpretation of a particular term(see Katriel and Philipsen, 1981), pronoun usage (see P. Friedrich, "Social Context and Semantic Feature: The Russian Pronominal Usage," in Gumperz and Hymes, 1972, pp. 270-300), conversational openings (see E. Schegloff, "Sequencing in Conversational Openings," in Gumperz and Hymes, 1972, pp. 346-380), and so on.

[61] Weick, 1981, p. 19.

[62] For an example of the former see K. Basso, "To Give up on Words: Silence in Western Apache Culture," Southwest Journal of Anthropology, Autumn (1970), 67-85; for the latter see P. Gardner, "Symmetric Respect and Memorate Knowledge: The Structure and Ecology of Individualistic Cultures," Southwest Journal of Anthropology, 22(1966), 389-415.